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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000815

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SUBJECT: RELIGIOUS LEADER SEES COUP AND CNDD AS A POLITICAL
CASTASTROPHE

Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D
)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. A respected Christian leader called Guinea's recent coup d'etat and subsequent installation of the Council for Democracy and Development (CNDD) a political "catastrophe." He expressed disappointment over the lack of civilian leadership and the general complacency with which the population has accepted the new government. Contact commented that the CNDD is inexperienced and unprepared for the job ahead. He also said he was embarrassed over the way in which the CNDD is interacting with the international community. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On December 31, Poloff met with Monsigneur Gomez, the Anglican Archbishop and head of Guinea's Christian Council. Embassy has met with Gomez many times in the past to exchange views on Guinea's political and social situation. Gomez is well respected by the general population and is known for his balanced and thoughtful views on key issues.

¶3. (C) Although most Guineans seem to have welcomed the December 23 coup and the subsequent installation of the Council for Democracy and Development (CNDD), Monsigneur Gomez did not share these sentiments. Through the course of the meeting, he repeatedly expressed shock and disappointment at how political events have evolved since President Conte's death on December 22. Gomez said that he attended the December 27 meeting between the CNDD and civil society leaders and was "astonished and disappointed to see all the politicians applauding." He commented that these leaders should be at the front of a civilian effort to restore civilian rule, but that instead, they are content to sit back and trust that the new government is going to be better than the last one.

¶4. (C) According to Gomez, the political parties are not ready for elections, they lack a clear political agenda, and they have little to stand on other than ethnic ties. He said that the parties do not want to move to elections too fast because everyone is focused on their personal interests, namely becoming president, and want to ensure that they develop a strong enough constituent base to guarantee their victory. "These weaknesses are exactly what kept Conte strong," Gomez said, adding "if the parties had been better prepared when Conte was alive, we would not be in this situation today."

¶5. (C) Gomez said that no one was surprised that the military had seized power. "No one knew when it would happen or who would do it, but we knew a coup was coming," he said. However, Gomez said that he could not believe how unprepared the coup leaders were given that they had so much time to organize themselves and develop a political plan. He said he was shocked that a young captain with no political experience emerged as the nation's leader. "These guys are just like a bunch of children...they have no idea what they are

doing...they just seize power with no particular strategy in mind and then expect everything to take care of itself," Gomez said.

¶16. (C) Referring to the December 30 meeting between the diplomatic community and the CNDD (to be reported septel), Gomez said "I was absolutely shocked by yesterday's meeting; it was a catastrophe." He later said that he was embarrassed by President Moussa Dadis Camara's comments and attitude, saying that it demonstrated how ill prepared Camara is to lead the country. Gomez added that the CNDD is talking about all the same problems that everyone else has been talking about for years, i.e. corruption, constitutional reform, judicial reform, etc., but that the CNDD has no concrete program in mind to address those issues. "They are just like everybody else we have seen...same issues, same promises, no action" he said. Pointing out that the CNDD had begun nominating ministers before the new prime minister had even landed in country, Gomez said that it is unlikely that civilian government officials will have any real authority. "There is no change here," he said.

¶17. (C) When Poloff commented on civil society's lackluster response to the installation of another military leader as president of the country, Gomez said that the country may actually be accepting something worse than they had before. "At least we knew what we had under Conte," he said, "we do not know anything about this guy." Gomez commented that Guineans lack a sense of national dignity. "I watched the same thing when Sekou Toure died. Everyone was out in the street, crying and mourning, and then all of a sudden Conte emerged as the new hero and everyone was celebrating...we

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knew nothing about him either, but we accepted him for nearly 25 years," Gomez said.

¶18. (C) Gomez commented that the CNDD is trying to tackle too many priorities at the same time. "They should only be focusing on organizing elections; constitutional reform and other issues should be left to a democratically elected civilian government," Gomez said. He added that Toure amended the constitution to suit his own purposes, as did Conte. "If the CNDD amends the constitution, it would likely only serve to strengthen the CNDD's power," he said.

¶19. (C) According to Gomez, no one single political party can effectively govern the country because no one party has a clear majority. "The presidential system does not work in Guinea...what we need is a parliamentary system with a prime minister and no president," he told Poloff. Gomez said that the best solution would be to move forward with legislative elections in order to have credible legislative body that could then begin to address the constitutional issues. "If they can start work without a president, they can think about eliminating the position," he said. Gomez added "the only reason Sekou Toure and Lansana Conte could maintain their dictatorships was because the constitution allowed them to do so."

COMMENT

¶10. (C) In previous discussions, Gomez has never been pro-Conte, but rather, pro-reform. His disappointment with the current political situation seemed to stem not from the fact that the military stepped in to seize power, but from the fact that civilian leadership has not pressured the military to restore civilian control. He was concerned that events may be moving in a dangerous direction. Gomez did not see CNDD members as sincerely interested in advancing reforms and turning power over to civilians. At the same time, he was not convinced that the political parties and other civil actors would be able to set aside their personal ambitions in order to work together for the common good. He repeatedly

commented that civil society remains divided and that its continued failure to coalesce may ultimately perpetuate the problems of the past. END COMMENT.
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